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HD **New Zealand schools to teach students about climate crisis, activism and 'eco anxiety'**

BY Charlotte Graham-McLay in Wellington

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Changes to the curriculum will put the country at the forefront of climate crisis education worldwide

Every school in New Zealand will this year have access to materials about the climate crisis written by the country's leading science agencies – including tools for students to plan their own activism, and to process their feelings of "eco-anxiety" over global heating.

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The curriculum will put New Zealand at the forefront of climate change education worldwide; governments in neighbouring Australia and the United Kingdom have both faced criticism for lack of cohesive teaching on the climate crisis. The New Zealand scheme, which will be offered to all schools that teach 11 to 15 year-old students, will not be compulsory, the government said.

"One of the pieces of feedback we've got from teachers around the country is that they're really crying out for something like this, because kids are already in the conversation about climate change," said James Shaw, New Zealand's climate change minister and co-leader of the left-leaning Green Party.

"They're seeing stuff on social media on a daily basis and none of it's good news, and the sense of powerlessness that comes from that is extremely distressing."

Hundreds of thousands of school and university students around the world, including in New Zealand, walked out of their classes for a series of climate strikes during 2019, a year when scientists warned that climate change was an "existential threat to civilisation".

Young people feel betrayed and abandoned by older generations over their lack of action on the climate issue, and worry about it has increasingly sparked anxiety and depression, a group of British psychologists warned in September.

A pilot of the New Zealand scheme, which ran in one school in the city of Christchurch in 2018, had led to the introduction of materials for the national roll-out that helped students process their emotions about the climate issue, Shaw told The Guardian.

"Being in the conversation itself causes stress," he said. By necessity, he added, students would "delve into the bad news" of the science explaining the climate crisis. But the resources had been bolstered with "quite an emphasis on talking through with students how they're feeling about it," he said.

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Materials created for teachers that were provided to the Guardian suggest students keep a “feelings thermometer” to track their emotions, learn how to change defeatist self-talk, and consider how their feelings could generate action and response.

“It helps kids to see that it is a fixable problem and people are working on it, and there is something they can foresee for themselves in terms of their own futures,” said Shaw.

Another tool in the curriculum helps students create and carry out an action plan on a particular environmental issue – such as creating an edible garden.

The curriculum included text, video, and advice for teachers, the education minister Chris Hipkins said in a statement.

“It explains the role science plays in understanding climate change, aids understanding of both the response to it and its impacts – globally, nationally and locally – and explores opportunities to contribute to reducing and adapting to it impact on everyday life,” he added.

While the Paris climate agreement, signed in 2015, urges signatory countries to implement climate education, many countries who made the pledge have not fulfilled it, including New Zealand’s nearest neighbour Australia, according to the science publication The Conversation.

While some parts of Britain have enacted their own climate literacy plans, there is not a nationwide curriculum to teach it. The Labour party urged such a policy last May.

Italy will this year become the first country in the world to make sustainability and the climate crisis compulsory subjects for students, with material integrated into regular lessons, such as mathematics and geography.

NS gsci : Sciences/Humanities | gclimt : Climate Change | gedu : Education | gscho : School | gcat : Political/General News | genv : Natural Environment | gglobe : Global/World Issues

RE nz : New Zealand | austr : Australia | apacz : Asia Pacific | ausnz : Australia/Oceania

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